



National Native American Heritage Month 2010



PREPARED BY: Information Resource Center, Public Affairs Office, U.S. EMBASSY

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"The indigenous peoples of North America -- the First Americans -- have woven rich and diverse threads into the tapestry of our Nation's heritage. Throughout their long history on this great land, they have faced moments of profound triumph and tragedy alike. During National Native American Heritage Month, we recognize their many accomplishments, contributions, and sacrifices, and we pay tribute to their participation in all aspects of American society...."



Barack Obama

PROCLAMATION ON NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

The indigenous peoples of North America -- the First Americans -- have woven rich and diverse threads into the tapestry of our

Nation's heritage. Throughout their long history on this great land, they have faced moments of profound triumph and tragedy alike. During National Native American Heritage Month, we recognize their many accomplishments, contributions, and sacrifices, and we pay tribute to their participation in all aspects of American society.

This month, we celebrate the ancestry and time-honored traditions of American Indians and Alaska Natives in North America. They have guided our land stewardship policies, added immeasurably to our cultural heritage, and demonstrated courage in the face of adversity. From the American Revolution to combat missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, they have fought valiantly in defense of our Nation as dedicated servicemen and women. Their native languages have also played a pivotal role on the battlefield. During World Wars I and II, Native American code talkers developed unbreakable codes to communicate military messages that saved countless lives. Native Americans have distinguished themselves as inventors, entrepreneurs, spiritual leaders, and scholars. Our debt to our First Americans is immense, as is our responsibility to ensure their fair, equal treatment and honor the commitments we made to their forbears.

The Native American community today faces huge challenges that have been ignored by our Government for too long. To help address this disparity, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act allocates more than \$3 billion to help these communities deal with their most pressing needs. In the Fiscal Year 2010 budget, my Administration has proposed over \$17 billion for programs carried out by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Service, and other Federal agencies that have a critical role to play in improving the lives of Native Americans. These programs will increase educational opportunities, address the scourge of alcohol abuse and domestic violence, promote economic development, and provide access to comprehensive, accessible, and affordable health care. While funding increases do not make up for past deficiencies, they do reflect our determination to honor tribal sovereignty and ensure continued progress on reservations across America.

As we seek to build on and strengthen our nation-to-nation relationship, my Administration is committed to ensuring tribal communities have a meaningful voice in our national policy debates as we confront the challenges facing all Americans. We will continue this constructive dialogue at the White House Tribal Nations Conference held in Washington, D.C., this month. Native American voices have echoed through the mountains, valleys, and plains of our country for thousands of years, and it is now our time to listen.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim November 2009 as National Native American Heritage Month. I call upon all Americans to commemorate this month with appropriate programs and activities, and to celebrate November 27, 2009, as Native American Heritage Day.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this thirtieth day of October, in the year of our Lord two thousand nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-fourth.

BARACK OBAMA

U.S. HONORS CONTRIBUTIONS OF AMERICAN INDIANS, ALASKA NATIVES

Washington — Each November, National American Indian Heritage Month pays tribute to the legacy of the American Indians and Alaska Natives — the first Americans — and celebrates their enduring contributions to the history and culture of the United States.

Today, there are nearly 5 million American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States, or 1.6 percent of the total population, and this is expected to jump to

8.6 million, or 2 percent of the population, by 2050.



Rylan Baker, appearing at the National Museum of the American Indian, demonstrates the Men's Fancy Dance.

Most American Indians live in metropolitan areas and not on the 227,000 square kilometers of land held in trust for reservations. The states with the largest numbers of American Indians and Alaska Natives are California, Oklahoma and Arizona.

There are 564 federally recognized Indian tribes in the United States. The largest, by far, are the Cherokee and Navajo nations, according to the 2000 U.S. census. (See "[United States Respects Indian Tribes' Right to Self-Determination](#).")

Navajo is the most widely spoken American Indian language, and almost one-fourth of Navajos speak a language other than English at home — the highest percentage of all tribes. Unfortunately, only one-half of the 300 or so native languages once spoken in North America still have any living speakers. (See "[Navajo Textbook Aims to Preserve Language, Culture](#).")

A study by the public opinion research organization Public Agenda found that non-Indians have little knowledge of the active, vibrant culture of American Indians today. There was a consensus among both Indians and non-Indians in the study about the need for more education on American Indian

history and culture. (See "[American Indians Seek Greater Understanding, Recognition](#).")

The first U.S. state to set aside a day to recognize the importance of American Indians in the nation's history was New York, in 1916. National American Indian Heritage Month was first designated in 1990 under a joint congressional resolution approved by President George H. W. Bush.

Each year, the sitting president issues a [proclamation](#), as did President Obama this year. On November 5, Obama hosted the first-ever White House Tribal Nations Conference, calling it "the largest and most widely attended gathering of tribal leaders in our history." (See [President Obama's opening remarks](#).)



The National Museum of the American Indian, in Washington

CREATION OF AMERICAN INDIAN HERITAGE MONTH

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs provides some background on what has become an annual celebration of the culture and contributions of American Indians and Alaska Natives. What started at the turn of the century as an effort to gain a day of recognition for the significant contributions the first Americans made to the establishment and growth of the United States has resulted in a whole month being designated for that purpose.

One of the very early proponents of an American Indian Day was Arthur C. Parker, a Seneca Indian, who was the director of the Museum of Arts and Science in Rochester, New York. He persuaded the Boy Scouts of America to set aside a day for the "First Americans" and for three years they adopted such a day. In 1915, the annual Congress of the American Indian Association meeting in Lawrence, Kansas, formally approved a plan concerning American Indian Day. It directed its president, Reverend Sherman Coolidge, an Arapahoe, to call on the country to observe such a day. Coolidge issued a proclamation on September 28, 1915, which declared the second Saturday of each May as an American Indian Day and contained the first formal appeal for recognition of Indians as citizens.

The year before this proclamation was issued, Red Fox James, a Blackfoot Indian, rode horseback from state to state seeking approval for a day to honor Indians. On December 14, 1915, he presented the endorsements of 24 state governments at the White House. There is no record, however, of such a national day being proclaimed. The first American Indian Day in a state was declared on the second Saturday in May 1916 by New York Governor Charles S. Whitman. Several states celebrate the fourth Friday in September. In Illinois, for example, legislators enacted such a day in 1919. Several states designated Columbus Day as Native American Day, but it continues to be a day observed without any recognition as a national legal holiday.

In 1990, President George H.W. Bush approved a joint resolution designating November 1990 "National American Indian Heritage Month." Similar proclamations have been issued each year since 1994.

See the U.S. Census Bureau Web site for a [fact sheet](#) on American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month and [additional data](#) on the American Indian and Alaska Native population. Both the [U.S. Library of Congress](#) and the [National Park Service](#) have

Web pages devoted to American Indian Heritage Month. The Library of Congress Veterans History Project includes a [guide](#) to American Indian and Alaska Native military veterans and interviews with former Navajo "code talkers" [Keith Little](#) and [Merril Sandoval](#).

For more information, see "[American Indian History, Culture](#)" and "[American Indian Heritage Month Links](#)" on *America.gov*. Also see the Web site of the Department of Interior's [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#). The Web site of the U.S. Embassy in Berlin lists numerous [information resources](#) on Native Americans.

ENLACES WEB

American Indian Heritage Foundation,
URL: <http://www.indians.org/>

American Indian Heritage Month,
URL:
http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/heritage_month/aih/index.html

American Indian Artists: a Tale of Two Visionaries,
URL: <http://www.america.gov/american-indians.html>

American Indians in Modern Times (Photo Gallery),
URL:
http://www.america.gov/multimedia/photogallery.html#/4110/amer_indian/

Native American Heritage Month
URL: <http://nativeamericanheritagemonth.gov/>

National Museum of the American Indian
URL: <http://www.nmai.si.edu/>

National Congress of American Indians,
URL: <http://www.ncai.org/>

U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs,
URL: <http://www.bia.gov/>



SYMBOL: Day Dream Catcher

AMERICAN INDIANS IN MODERN TIMES

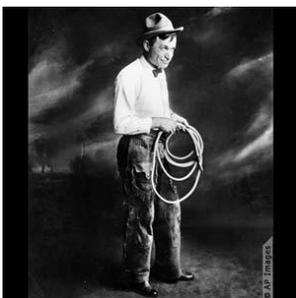
Jim Thorpe, of Saux and Fox descent, was “probably the greatest natural athlete in modern times,”



according to The New York Times. He won gold medals in the decathlon and pentathlon at the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm. Thorpe

played both professional football and baseball. He was also the first president of the American Professional Football Association, the predecessor of the National Football League. In 1950, the Associated Press named him the greatest American football player and the greatest male athlete. He died in 1953.

Born on his family’s ranch in 1879, entertainer **Will Rogers**, of Cherokee



descent, learned to ride and lasso as a young child. He dropped out of high school to become a cowboy and traveled internationally with the circus. Rogers began performing on the

vaudeville circuit and later entered the film industry. He was known for his comedic observations about people, especially those in power. Many of the leaders he joked about were close personal friends. His death in a

plane crash in 1935 prompted congressional tributes and national mourning.

Maria Tallchief is a critically acclaimed ballerina. Tallchief, whose father was a



member of the Osage tribe, danced with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and with the Ballet Society, which later became the New York City Ballet. She was the prima ballerina there

from 1954 to 1955. After her retirement from dance in 1965, she became an artistic director for various ballet companies in Chicago. In 1996, Tallchief was inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame and received a Kennedy Center Honor medal, a prestigious award for artists.

Ben Nighthorse Campbell, former senator and congressman from Colorado, made



political history by changing his party affiliation (from Democrat to Republican) while in the Senate. Campbell’s ancestry is a mix of Cheyenne and

Portuguese. A gold medalist in judo at the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo, he later became a jewelry designer, but put his art on hold in 1987 when he was elected to the House of Representatives. Elected to the Senate in 1992, he served as chair of the Committee on Indian Affairs. Campbell retired from public office in 2004.

John Nieto (half-Apache, half-Hispanic) is an artist whose depictions of American Indians and Western wildlife have earned him worldwide fame. His works have been exhibited in Europe, Japan, Latin America and Africa, as well as in the United States. In



1994, he was the recipient of the New Mexico Governor's Award for Achievement in the Arts. He has served on the advisory board of the Wheelwright

Museum in Santa Fe and on the board of trustees at his alma mater, Southern Methodist University. He was named a distinguished alumnus in 2006.

Golfer **Notah Begay III** is the first American Indian to win on the Professional



Golfers Association (PGA) Tour. Begay, who is Navajo and Pueblo, took up golf at age 6. He attended Stanford University, where he played on the golf team. The

team won the 1994 national championships, with Begay setting a tournament record. After earning a degree in economics, Begay became a professional golfer and placed first on the PGA Tour four times. In 2005, he started the Notah Begay III Foundation, which raises money for programs for young American Indians.

Astronaut **John Herrington**, a Chickasaw, is the first American Indian to orbit in space.



He started his career in 1984 as a naval aviator. During his time in the military, he received various service awards, including the Navy Commendation Medal. Herrington began

working for NASA in 1996. He logged 20 hours of space walks with the shuttle Endeavour as a mission specialist. In 2008,

Herrington launched a 4,000-mile bike trek across the country to educate youngsters about opportunities in science, technology, math and engineering.

Writer **Linda Hogan** is a member of the Chickasaw tribe. She writes poetry and



fiction. *Mean Spirit*, her 1990 book, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and won the Oklahoma Book Award. She also is the recipient of the Guggenheim Award for fiction. Hogan has

served on the board of the National Endowment for the Arts and as a writer-in-residence for the states of Colorado and Oklahoma. Currently, she is a tribal writer-in-residence for the Chickasaw Nation.

AMERICAN INDIAN DRESSES BLEND TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Exhibit traces history of dressmaking by indigenous peoples over 200 years



Cheyenne three-hide dress made by Rebecca Hamilton Brady and Jon Brady of Pawnee, Oklahoma (Ernest Amoroso/Smithsonian)

By **Lauren Monsen**
USINFO Staff
Writer

Washington -- The prominent roles of women in American Indian societies are mirrored in the evolving designs of the ceremonial dresses and accessories they have created over the past 200 years, says Emil Her Many Horses, an expert on

Northern and Southern Plains cultures at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). Her Many Horses, a member of the Oglala Lakota (Sioux) nation of South Dakota, is co-curator of the NMAI exhibit "Identity by Design: Tradition, Change, and Celebration in Native Women's Dresses." The exhibit traces the history of native dressmaking from the 19th century to the present, with examples of richly ornamented deerhide and cloth dresses representing a variety of North American tribal and regional styles.

The dresses, shown with moccasins, leggings and other handmade items, illuminate the vibrant artistic traditions of American Indian communities. "In our cultures, artistic ability is considered a spiritual gift," Her Many Horses told *USINFO*. "Women who excelled at dressmaking always were held in high regard" for contributing to their families' well-being, and their creations enhanced the status of their families within the tribal framework. Designs "sometimes originated from dreams and visions," he said, but societal changes also played a part in design trends. As North America's indigenous societies came into contact with white settlers in the 19th century, new materials such as glass beads, wool, cotton, ribbons and silver buttons were acquired through trading and quickly found their way into native dressmaking designs. Traditional methods of embellishment -- such as stitching elk teeth onto a deerhide surface, adorning a war bonnet with eagle feathers or painting symbolic motifs -- remained popular, but were combined with intricate beadwork patterns.

American Indian women had to learn how to circumvent heavy-handed restrictions on their customs and ceremonies. In the late 19th century, U.S. government authorities pressured tribes to assimilate into white culture and tried to eradicate tribal languages by enrolling American Indian children in English-only schools. Paiute tribal

elders responded by establishing the Ghost Dance, a ceremony that called for a revival of the traditional Indian way of life. It soon took hold among tribes throughout the American West. The federal government -- fearing tribal insurrections -- banned the Ghost Dance in 1890 and insisted that traditional ceremonies be replaced by patriotic displays on official holidays such as Independence Day, celebrated annually on July 4th.



Sioux two-hide pattern dress with fully beaded yoke (Ernest Amoroso /Smithsonian)

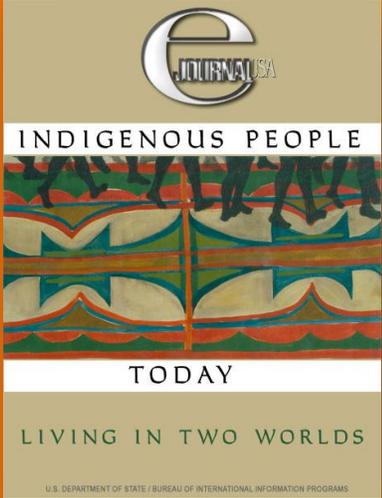
Indigenous societies outwardly complied with this demand by staging July 4th celebrations with elaborately costumed dancers. But those dancers -- wearing fringed and beaded outfits designed by resourceful native dressmakers -- were sending coded messages to their communities, signaling tribal solidarity in the face of government repression. They performed traditional dance steps, and their costumes -- adorned with beaded representations of the U.S. flag -- used conventional patriotic imagery to honor their own warrior ancestors. Today's American Indian dressmakers still bead their costumes with red, white and blue flag motifs to pay tribute to U.S. war veterans within tribal families. In fact, the Kiowa tribe now dedicates its age-old War Dance ceremony to its soldiers serving in Iraq and elsewhere. The finely crafted buckskin dresses worn by Kiowa dancers are an integral part of this custom, said Her Many Horses.

He also pointed to the Fancy Dance and Shawl Dance practitioners, who take part in dance competitions at contemporary social gatherings. The dancers wear extravagantly decorated costumes with long fringe that sways with every movement or dance step. Thus, the dressmaking skills of native women continue to perpetuate their tribal heritage. Although the traditional elements of costume design are passed down through generations, today's innovators ensure that dressmaking techniques also look to the future. The "Identity by Design" exhibit opens with a video of dancers in modern-day ceremonial garb, followed by a panoramic display of dresses, leggings, moccasins and cradleboards from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The exhibit also includes heirloom-quality garments from award-winning American Indian dressmakers of the 21st century.

At the exhibit's conclusion, dressmakers and dancers appear in a film montage, offering commentary on the larger meaning of ceremonial American Indian clothing. Georgianna Old Elk, an Assiniboine, explains that the dress she wears in dance competitions was a gift from her extended family. "When I dance, I am never alone," she says. "Even though they are gone now, they are still with me, and I feel them with me." In the film, dancer/designer Keri Jhane Myers, a Comanche, says she ventures into New York City's fashion district to hunt for unusual dressmaking materials whenever she travels to East Coast dance competitions. "You look at the things available, and how you could incorporate them while keeping to a type of tradition," she says. The NMAI exhibit has generated "a very positive response" from viewers who are "dazzled by the phenomenal artistry" of indigenous craftswomen, said Her Many Horses, but its main purpose is "to highlight the traditions and roles of Native women dressmakers in their societies, then and now. In Native societies, women are really

the keepers of tradition and knowledge. They keep the culture alive."

The exhibit has been on display at NMAI since March and will remain open until September 2008. The [exhibit](#) also may be viewed on the Smithsonian's Web site.



EJOURNAL
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE
TODAY

The June 2009 edition of eJournal USA provides insight into Native Americans and other indigenous peoples. Articles provide historical background and look at issues surrounding their languages and culture, their legal status, and how they are networking around the world.

URL:
<http://www.america.gov/publications/ejournalusa.html#0609>

North American Native Peoples, in Numbers

In Census 2000, 4.3 million people, or 1.5 percent of the total U.S. population, reported that they were American Indian and Alaska Native. This number included 2.4 million people, or 1 percent, who reported only American Indian and Alaska Native as their race.

AGE

Under 18 ... 31.5 %
 Between 18 and 64 ... 61.7%
 Over 65 5.6 %

LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME

Only English at home 71.8 %
 No English Spoken. English Spoken Well..... 17.8 %
 English spoken less than "very well"..... 10.3 %

EDUCATION

(Population 25 or older)
 Less than high school..... 29.1 %
 High school graduate 29.2 %
 College graduate..... 30.2%
 Bachelor's degree or higher... 11.5 %

INCOMES

Average for Men \$30,376.00
 Average for women \$ 23,884.00

POVERTY

Individuals under poverty line 17.2%

OCCUPATION

Management; professionals 27.8%
 Service occupations 18.6%
 Sales and office occupations 25.9%
 Farming, fishing and forestry 0.9%
 Construction, extraction, and maintenance 11.2%
 Production, transportation 15.5%

MAIN TRIBAL GROUPINGS

Apache 104,556
 Cherokee 875,276
 Chippewa 159,744
 Choctaw 173,314
 Creek 76,159
 Iroquois 89,371
 Lumbee 59,488
 Navajo 309,575
 Pueblo 73,687
 Sioux 167,869

ALASKA NATIVES

Alaska Athabascan 18,874
 Eskimo 56,824
 Tlingit-Haida 22,786

Source: "We the people: American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States", U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

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